Literary Lens Definitions

(Student Copy)

**FEMINIST CRITICISM**

Definition: The primary agenda of Feminist critics is to investigate how a literary work either tends to serve or to challenge a patriarchal (male dominated) view of society. They maintain that literature should be analyzed with the goal of explaining how the text exemplifies or reveals important insights about sex roles and society’s structure. They point out that the traditional “canon” – those works long deemed to be the best that has been thought and said in human culture – tend to define females as “other,” or as an object, compared to the male’s privileged subject status. Feminist criticism focuses on social relationships, including the patterns of thought, behavior, values, enfranchisement and power between the sexes. It is “a political act whose aim is not simply to interpret the world but to change it by changing the consciousness of those who read and their relation to what they read…” (Judith Fetterly)

Recurring Question: How does the text mirror or question a male-dominated (phallocentric) view of reality?

**Essential Questions:**

**How would this book be different if a man wrote it?**

**What patriarchal structures can you see in the novel; jobs, marriages, war etc.**

**Feminist symbolism; sausages, eggs, guns, knives, locks and keys, etc**

**What is the position of the female characters in the book?**

**PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM**

Definition: Criticism that analyzes literature from the position that texts express the inner workings of the human mind; this approach often focuses on the choices of humans as moral agents. Leo Tolstoy, the accomplished Russian novelist, believed that the purpose of literature was “to make humans good by choice.” Literature through the power of story has the ability to engage the individual imaginatively in other worlds and other times. It invites the reader to put him or herself in the position of other human beings; to empathize. The Psychological critic is interested in every phase of human interaction and choice as developed in the text. Literature constantly informs us about and leads us to question what it means to be a human being. The Psychological critic closely follows these revelations and takes them as a central subject for analysis.

Recurring Question: What is the text telling us about what it means to be a human being? Would you act like the main character in the same circumstances?

**Essential Questions:**

**What psychological factors make the character behaves the way they do?**

**What is the right behavior in the various characters? What is wrong? Why do you feel this?**

**Do you feel John or Pedro should have ended up with Tita? Explain your reason.**

**What psychological control did Mama Elena have on her family? To what extends should parents have control?**

**What was Tita’s greatest achievement? Psychologically, how did she overcome?**

**ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM (aka Mythological Criticism)**

Definition: This approach to literature stems from the notion that texts ultimately point out the universality of human experience. Built largely on the psychology of Carl Jung, Archetypal criticism contends that there are certain shared memories that exist in the collective unconscious of the human species, a storehouse of images and patterns, vestigial traces of which inhere in all human beings and which find symbolic expression in all human art, including its literature. (Think, for example, of the spontaneous associations you have while watching a sunset. They are not unique.) Practitioners such as Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell have discerned a complex and comprehensive correspondence between the basic story patterns of humans – comedy, romance, tragedy and irony – and the myths and archetypal patterns associated with the seasonal cycle of spring, summer, fall and winter. The death/rebirth theme is said to be the archetype of archetypes.

Recurring Question: What universal patterns of human experience are evidenced and are being explored in the text?

**Essential Questions:**

**Does romantic thinking shape the directions of characters?**

**Is Tita’s life shaped by a destiny that controls the journey she chooses to follow?**

**Does Tita love Pedro because he is the only person capable of fitting her ideal of romantic love?**